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THE THEATRE;

ITS EARLY DAYS IN CHICAGO.

A PAPER READ BEFORE

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BY J. H. McVICKER.

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THE THEATRE;

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"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form, and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!"

ACCEPTING the world as he found it, Shakespeare made this masterpiece his study. His theme was humanity. His intent to so place the "paragon of animals" that he might see his "shadow as he passed," holding before him the lesson, that as he was endowed with attributes of God and Devil, to reach the first he must forego the promptings of the latter, and banish selfishness.

This "beauty of the world" is intuitively

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religious and dramatic; those who dissent from the teachings of the book of Genesis, falling back on modern theories, may deny the religious element, but must admit the pantomimic nature of their ancestors.

Both the dramatic and religious elements are birthrights. The former being first to make itself known — even in the cradle — while the latter, waking at a later period and being more closely allied to selfishness, has been over-zealous to crush out that which should have been its pride to nourish, hence for centuries a lack of harmony prevailed with these twin-born elements which when reached will make the world more bright.

Gervinus tells us that "all the dramatic art we find in England previous to Shakespeare, is only like a mute waymark to an unknown end, through a path full of luxuriant underwood and romantic wildness, affording

presentiment of the beauty of nature — but never its enjoyment."

The birth of Shakespeare marked an era in the world's advancement as potent for good as that of Luther. His religion taught in nature's school with living pictures; depicting the deformity of sin that it may be shunned, and the grandeur of truth and charity that they may be embraced.

It is now about three hundred years since Shakespeare's company was permitted to be called "The Queen's Players," Elizabeth's kind patronage having done so much for stage plays and dramatic literature, that in and about the city of London a half dozen theatres were maintained, to the chagrin and horror of those who could see but one side to the Reformation then going on.

While the origin of the drama was religious in form, the motive of those who guided its

early steps was not "to hold the mirror up to nature"; not to create thought; and when evidence was given of a desire to break from the shackles with which it had been bound, opposition to its advance came entirely from those who had endeavored, but failed, to control its march. This opposition sprang from an eagerness to strangle nature and teach that thought, with the people, should lie dormant, — that no obstacle might be offered to "salvation by faith."

What a change in brief three hundred years, which are as but a moment of time. in the world's history! How different is it now, when we find in every city and village of this, the happiest nation on earth, Shakespeare and the Bible side by side, valued for the good that is in them! The drama now finds a home erected for it, at the dictation of the people who crave it as part of their daily life, and in

every new town the school house, the church and the theatre are looked upon as necessities to aid in the progress and prosperity of the place.

In this country the drama was gaining strength about the time the place where we now dwell entered the ranks of civilization! How dramatic was the birth of our present home! How dramatic is the advance of man! History is deficient and unreliable in the brief records of that boon to human life, amusement! That which is looked for with the rising sun, and only given up to seek slumber, seems to have been unworthy the thought and reflection of those who prepared our history; and yet amusement is a great humanizer.

By its own force, aided by the love of the people, the theater now occupies a proud position, when we reflect upon the terrible opposition it has encountered from a most powerful enemy.

What a spectacle was that which occurred but half a century ago, and terminated by giving us the home we now love! A capable artist would find work in painting, with the bright colors of the setting sun, the picture of the signing of the treaty which removed the red and installed the white face as master here. From the arrival of the commissioners to the signing of the document, scenes transpired which on the mimic stage might find a worthy place. A small cloud in the bright blue sky, bordered with a crimson horizon, served as an omen, warning the owners of the land that all argument on the subject of their departure must end, and the Chief of the Pottawatomies and the Ambassadors from the Great Father at Washington must remain silent till the sky should be clear for talk. The surrounding scene was bounded by the broad prairie and broader lake; the former dotted with tents

and Indian huts, while in the vicinity of Fort Dearborn floated canoes filled with young braves. In many places could be seen that curse and shame of our country, the fire-water, which the Great Father permitted to be sent to his weak children, with the knowledge that it must fire the blood and incite the worst passions which find a resting place in human nature. The little cloud in the otherwise bright sky formed a fitting accompaniment to this dark spot which clings to civilization. The scene, to the reflective mind, was animated — our country was making history! The squaw, the chief, the papoose, the drunken red and the drunken white man mingled together, while the representatives of a great nation wended their way to the little Fort to wait and hope that the morrow would dawn auspiciously to them. A bright sky came toward the end of September, 1833, and

the treaty was signed which terminated the red man's claims to the land of Chicago.*

The prologue was over! During the winter following these events, when the inhabitants did not number five hundred, the pioneers, depending on themselves for amusement, started a debating society, and elected Colonel J. B. Beaubien, President; there is no record of the subjects then discussed.

Mr. Charles Cleaver, who reached Chicago in 1833, tells us that "the store keepers played checkers while waiting for customers, and, after closing, played cards. Those religiously inclined went to prayer meeting at least once a week, and Mark Beaubien played the fiddle at the Sauganash Hotel for those who wished to dance."

Doubtless there are now living in Chicago those who were present at the first theatrical

* Blanchard's "History of Chicago," chapter xxiv.

performance given in the city, but dates are seldom in "our memory locked," and hence I have found it impossible to fix the exact time, yet for all purposes of history it will be sufficiently marked.

The first public entertainment, of any kind, to which an admission fee was charged, and of which any record can be found, took place on Monday, February 24, 1834, but a few months after the Pottawatomies had consented to give up their land to the white man. On the 18th day of that month the *Democrat* contained this advertisement: "Ladies and gentlemen are most respectfully informed that Mr. Barnes, professor *de tours amusants*, has arrived in town and will give an exhibition at the house of Mr. D. Graves, on Monday evening next." This entertainment was given in two parts: the first being feats of the Fire King; the second a display of ventriloquism

and legerdemain, which Mr. Barnes said were original and "too numerous to mention." The performance commenced at early candle light and the admission to it was fifty cents. While the classic tragedian would not admit that this entertainment was in any way connected with his art, and might claim that it should not be blended with a history of the drama, it must nevertheless be accepted as a starting point, even if his professional pride receives a snub. The second recorded performance was given June 11, 1834, when another ventriloquist, Mr. Kenworthy, according to the *Democrat*, delighted the inhabitants. On the 19th of June of the same year a concert was given by Mr. C. Blisse. Entertainments, shows and circuses preceded dramatic performance, of which the first mention bears date May 29, 1837, when Messrs. Dean and McKinney applied to the Council for a license to "open a theatre in

some suitable building for the term of one or more months as the business may answer." The authorities were asked to make the license payable weekly, but the request was denied and the Council named $100 as the amount, which sum must have dismayed the applicants, for they abandoned Chicago, and no dramatic performance took place under their management.

The original of this first application for a theatrical license, together with others covering a period of nine years from 1837, were found in the only vault belonging to the city, which withstood the flames of October 9, 1871, and are the only authentic records bearing on the subject of the early amusements of the city which I have been able to avail myself of. Among these applications is one asking for a permit to erect a "show of flying horses," and that the application should be in keeping with

the show, it is addressed to the M-A-R-E of Chicago. No response from his Honor is on record.

In this vault was found the following application, which is undoubtedly the first in reply to which a license was issued:

"Chicago, October 17, 1837. The subscribers respectfully petition the Honorable the Mayor and Council of the city of Chicago for a license to perform plays in said city. They respectfully represent that this establishment is intended to afford instruction as well as amusement; that they are encouraged and patronized by the leading portion of the inhabitants of the city, who are interested in their success; that they propose to remain here during the winter and that they make no calculation to receive more money in the city than what they shall expend during their stay and therefore they trust that in offering a rate

for license these facts may be taken into consideration. Isherwood & McKinzie, the petitioners, request this license for six months, if agreeable to the Board." The Council fixed the rate at $125.00 for the year, which amount the petitioners paid, while protesting that it was unjust to ask so much.

The first home of the overtaxed drama was the historic Sauganash Hotel located on the southeast corner of Lake and Market. During September, 1837, its proprietor, John Murphy, had vacated it, to move into his new house on the west side of the river and Isherwood & McKinzie converted the dining room of the Sauganash into a temple where Thalia, Melpomene and Terpsichore found their first Chicago home. The room was provided with rough seats for about two hundred persons. The floor was level, and a few common chairs were placed in front for ladies and their es-

corts. Mr. Isherwood, one of the managers, is still living; and, until within the past five or six years, occupied the position of scenic artist of Wallack's Theatre, New York. He painted the first scenery known to Chicago. I wrote him with the hope of reaching some exact dates, but as he has only memory to rely upon, I learned nothing but what I had obtained from others; though he replied in a very interesting letter, ending thus:

"In concluding this rambling epistle, I could almost say with King Lear 'you do me wrong to take me from the grave.' I am eighty years of age, and, with best wishes, remain yours truly, H. ISHERWOOD."

In this letter he tells me he cannot remember the date of opening, but thinks it was in November or December (it was in October), and he can remember but one play "The Stranger." It is not strange that those who

were merely spectators cannot recall that which one directly interested fails to remember.

As many of those who formed the first Chicago Company rose to distinction in the profession, the presumption is that the acting, judged on its own merits, would bear comparison with that of the present day.

Neither the exact date of the first theatrical performance, nor the plays presented, are matters of record, and I have been unable to awaken the memory of some of our early settlers who were no doubt present, but who do not feel sure enough of being so, to say what the play was, and the night on which it was given, but undoubtedly it was during October, 1837.

During the spring of 1838, the drama assumed such proportions that some of the citizens were opposed to its continuance in the

young city, doubtless thinking that municipal success could be assured without it.

On the 28th of April, 1838, the managers of the previous year petitioned the Council to grant them a license for one year, dating from the 12th of May. They set forth their intentions of becoming citizens, and expected to expend all the money they received; and prayed, therefore, that a small sum be named. They asked the license for a new home for the drama, as they were preparing the upper portion of the "Rialto" and shaping it for a theatre. The "Rialto" was a frame building on the west side of Dearborn street, Nos. 8 and 10, and that portion which was to become a theatre was a room thirty by eighty feet in size. This home of comedy and tragedy has been described by the poet, Benjamin F. Taylor, as "a den of a place looking more like a dismantled grist mill than the temple of any-

body. The gloomy entrance could have furnished the scenery for a nightmare, and the lights within were sepulchral enough to show up the coffin scene in Lucretia Borgia." "But for all that," continues Mr. Taylor, "those dingy old walls used to ring sometimes with renderings fine enough to grace grander Thespian temples, though there was a farce now and then somewhat broader than it was long."

When it became known that a theatre was to come into the very heart of the city, the "Rialto" (the Sauganash was in the outskirts) opposition presented itself by a petition to the Council, in the following words:

"Your petitioners would represent to your honorable body that they have understood that a petition is pending before your honorable body, for the license of a theatre, to be held and maintained in the room of the 'Rialto,' which is a wooden building, and sur-

rounded by wooden and combustible buildings. Your petitioners would further represent that theatres are subject to take fire, and are believed to be dangerous on that account to property in their vicinity, and that insurance cannot be obtained on property in their vicinity, except on greatly advanced premiums. And your petitioners do solemnly protest against the granting of such license to keep a theatre in such building, and thereby endanger the property and lives of your petitioners."

This document bears date May 1st, 1838, and that we may see the opposition to the theatre was powerful, I give the names signed to the petition:

J. Young Scammon,	O. H. Thompson,
E. G. Ryan,	Curtis Haven,
Henry Brown,	Wm. James,
Thomas R. Hubbard,	Mahlon Ayers,
I. R. Gavin,	Wm. H. Adams,

Erastus Brown,	J. Ballard,
C. Beers,	W. H. Taylor,
Walter Kimball,	E. K. Rogers,
Alonson Followsbee,	Tuthill King,
A. W. Fullerton,	Nelson Tuthill,
King, Walker & Co.,	G. W. Merville,
B. F. Knapp,	J. H. Woodworth,
E. S. Kingsbury,	S. Burton,
Lewis N. Wood,	A. Farnsworth,
E. G. Brown,	J. A. Smith,
Wm. Osborn,	B. W. Raymond,
Joseph L. Hanson,	Giles Spring.

Considering the number of inhabitants at that time, this list of names was a formidable opposition to any enterprise, and the Council evidently viewed the matter as of the utmost importance, as a special committee was appointed and empowered to decide on the propriety of giving a license. This committee was composed of Messrs. H. L. Rucker, E. B.

Williams and Grant Goodrich. The fate of the theatre was confided to them and such was the importance of the subject, they submitted to the Council a minority and majority report. Mr. Grant Goodrich, being in the minority, made a report strongly expressing his opposition to the theatre ; going further even than the petition of citizens. He urged, first that the place was unsuitably located in "one of the most compact blocks in the city, composed chiefly of wooden buildings." From this fact he contended that "life was endangered on every occasion when an audience assembled within the fragile walls ; and the enhanced liability of fire by the production of theatrical spectacles caused added apprehension of peril." Had Mr. Goodrich rested his case here, in all probability the "Rialto" would not have been licensed as a theatre, for his brother committeemen might have agreed with him and one

report only have been submitted to the Council; but he saw a danger greater than fire, and with eloquence pleaded "the menace to the moral welfare of the city by the establishment of a theatre." He believed "that the tendency of the performance at modern theatres was grossly demoralizing, destructive of principle," and that they "were the nurseries of crime." He regarded the project "as an alarming assault on the stronghold of youthful rectitude," and while he appreciated "the plays of Shakespeare and the classic drama, the probabilities of baser plays were so apparent as to justify the Council in denying a license." He admitted the city treasury was in need of funds, but urged that no "necessity was stern enough to offer a compensating excuse for this process of raising money."

Quoting from the majority report of Messrs. Rucker and Williams, I find that they deemed

it "inexpedient to enter into an inquiry of the morality of the drama in general, or of its moral tendency in this community. The moral world has long been divided on the first proposition, and your committee have no doubt but that such performances are approved by a large majority of the citizens of Chicago. It is true that the Committee are advised that some opposition is made to the prayer of the petitioners in consequence of the proposed locality of the theatre, and should the subject be brought before the Council in a proper manner, your Committee would feel bound to examine the subject, and give it such decision as the same demands, but in the subject referred to them, the Committee see nothing to warrant an examination into the question not involved in the matter before the Council. Your Committee, therefore, would recommend that the prayer of the

petitioners be granted, and that they be licensed under such restrictions as the nature of the case may require, and that the license be fixed at $125.00 per annum. Signed, H. L. Rucker and Eli B. Williams, Committee.

While Mr. Goodrich's report would be considered the most able in diction, it is evident he had gone too far, and allowing prejudice to creep into the subject, he had created an opposition to his mode of procedure. Morality had not been brought in question by either the managers or the citizens, who put in a counter petition. 'Tis true Mr. Goodrich may have understood them to mean morals when they said fire, but he should have remembered that history does not establish the fact that Common Councils or City governments give much attention to the purity of those they represent.

The Council fixed the license at $100.00, a

less amount than the Committee suggested, perhaps for the reason that the same parties had paid at a previous time for a longer period than they filled. The "Rialto" became known as the "Chicago Theatre," and while the Company remained about the same as at the Sauganash, new faces appeared, and it was at the "Rialto" the first Chicago appearance was made, of one who now justly enjoys a world-wide fame; one, who in my opinion should take rank as the head of the American Stage. I tried to cull from his memory some facts regarding early dates, but my efforts brought only the following letter:

"My Dear Mac: I am not quite sure that I remember dates and circumstances in their exact form, but will give you the benefit of all I know relating to Chicago theatricals. My father and his family arrived in Chicago, by

way of the lakes, in a steamer, somewhere about May, in the year 1838. He came to join Alexander McKinzie, my uncle, in the management of his new theatre. McKinzie had been manager of the old one the season before. I think the new theatre was the old one refitted. (This is an error.) I know it was quite the pride of the city and the idol of the new managers, for it had one tier of boxes and a gallery at the back. I don't think that the seats of the dress circle were stuffed, but I am almost sure that they were planed. The Company consisted of Wm. Leicester, Wm. Warren, James Wright, Charles Burke, Joseph Jefferson, Sr., Thomas Sankey, Wm. Childs, H. Isherwood, artist, Joseph Jefferson, Jr., Mrs. McKinzie, Mrs. J. Jefferson, my mother, Mrs. Ingersol, and Jane Germon. I was the comic singer of this party, making myself useful in small parts and first villagers; now and then

doing duty as a Roman Senator, at the back, wrapped in a clean hotel sheet, with my head peering over the profile banquet tables. I was just nine years old. I was found useful as Albert and Duke of York. In those days the audience used to throw money on the stage, either for comic songs or dances. And oh! (with that thoughtful prudence which has characterized my after life) how I used to lengthen out the verses. The stars during the season were Mrs. McClure, Dan Marble and A. A. Adams. Some of the plays acted were 'Lady of Lyons,' 'Stranger,' 'Rob Roy,' 'Damon and Pythias,' 'Wives as They Were, Maids as They Are,' 'Sam Patch,' etc. The theatre was at Randolph street; at least it strikes me that was the name. (It was on Dearborn.) The city about that time had from 3000 to 4000 inhabitants. I can remember following my father along the shore when

he went shooting, on what is now Michigan avenue. Ever yours,

JOSEPH JEFFERSON."

I have letters from other "Rialto" actors but they are not reliable as to dates, and mix the Sauganash and "Rialto" up. William Warren writes me:

"My experience, ripe as it is, does not verify the adage 'old people live in their memories of the past,' for I am not reminiscent, and have never kept diary or journal, or even preserved letters to serve as prompters." After giving his remembrance of the early theatres, he adds: "Who to see the great city of Chicago now, would believe that such things were, in the way of theatres, and acted in, within the memory of men as young as Jefferson? I fear you will say with Meddle, not much information elicited from this witness."

The first season of the "Rialto" lasted until October, when a benefit was tendered to Mr. McKinzie by a large number of citizens, who addressed him in a very complimentary note, lauding his efforts as a manager, and praising the artistic excellence and private worth of himself and company. As I have given the names of prominent citizens in the early days, who were opposed to theatres, here are those who addressed Mr. McKinzie as patrons and friends, and it will be noted none of the names are found on both lists, which fact may be received as evidence that there was a feeling in the community on the subject; perhaps from the fear of fire. Here is a list of the early friends of the early drama in Chicago:

H. L. Rucker,
J. W. Stroder,
B. S. Morris,
John Calhoun,
J. B. F. Russell,
F. Peyters,

S. Abell,
I. Curtis,
R. Z. Hamilton,
E. D. Taylor,
Nathan Allen,
Mark Skinner,
Julius Wadworth,
H. Loomis,
T. R. Hubbard,
W. A. McClure,
S. T. Otis,
J. M. Smith,
A. Garrett,
J. B. Hussely,
G. A. Beaumont,
C. H. Blair,
G. Hungerford,
Charles Walton,
W. Mason,
A. V. Nickerbocker,
Thomas Hoyne,
I. Allen,
Geo. Kerchival,
A. A. Humphrey,
N. B. Judd,
H. G. Loomis,
Thomas J. Durkin,
Jos. A. Cox,
Clifford S. Phillips,
R. P. Woodworth,
F. Faxton,
W. H. Davis,
E. S. Kimberly,
P. Nichols,
E. Maniere,
Wm. Wright,
Thomas Davis,
S. S. Bradley,
Frederick Bailey,
G. Glass,

J. Jay Stuart, D. W. C. Allen,
Hiram Pierson, C. T. Stanton,
H. O. Stone.

A similar number of more honored citizens cannot be selected from the inhabitants of Chicago in 1838. Their influence in all city matters was not lessened by the broad and liberal policy they pursued.

Mr. McKinzie replied in a befitting manner, assuring the gentlemen their kindness had "fallen upon a heart that is like the wave to receive, and the marble to retain the impression."

Those in the employ of Mr. McKinzie tendered their services on the occasion of the benefit, expressing the hope that prosperity might "ever attend the establisher of the drama in the 'far west.'" This was signed by Wm. Leicester, G. C. Germon and T. Sankey, for the Company. The benefit took place

October 18, 1838, and Bulwer's play of the "Lady of Lyons," then new, was given with this cast:

Claude Melnotte, - - - - Mr. Wm. Leicester.
Beauseant, - - - - - - - - - Mr. Wm. Warren.
Glavis, - - - - - - - - - - Mr. G. C. Gormon.
Col. Dumas, - - - - - - - - - Mr. T. Sankey.
Deschappelles, - - - - - - - - Mr. J. Wright.
Gaspar, - - - - - - - - - - - - Mr. C. Burke.
Officer, - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Mr. Watts.
Pauline, - - - - - - - - - - - - Mrs. Ingersol.
Madame Deschappelles, - - - Mrs. Jefferson.
Widow Melnotte, - - - - - - Mrs. McKinzie.

After the play Master Jefferson sang the comic song of "Lord Lovell and Lady Nancy," and Mr. Germon gave Chicago, for the first time, "The Hunters of Kentucky." The performance concluded with the "Two Friends," a very pretty drama. The curtain rose at seven precisely. In those days and nights

fashion had not seized the city, and all things were done earlier than now. Over forty-five years have passed since this performance was given, and four of those who took part in the "Lady of Lyons," are still living; six are acting in a better world.

The fire of 1871 was so destructive of newspaper files and other documents relating to the early days of our city that I have been unable to fix the exact day of the opening of the season of 1838, or of its close; it has escaped even the memory of those who took part in it. It is safe, however, to assume that it commenced about the middle of May, and was drawing to a close when this benefit was given to the manager.

I find no dramatic performances were given here during the winter of 1838–39, and the next record is to be found in the daily "American," of April 17th, 1839, which stated

that Mr. McKinzie has received a license "to start his theatre again on the payment of $75, provided no fireworks are allowed in his theatrical exhibitions." The "American," aware of the divided sentiment existing with the community on theatrical matters, made evident by the two lists of names I have given, straddled the fence on the subject, thus:

"We are aware that theatres are obnoxious to a respectable and intelligent part of every community, but they are permitted, and must be permitted, on the ground of general expediency, if for no other reason." This was an editorial, and sounds like many written to-day. Doubtless the editor thought he was giving the theatre a favorable notice, and smoothing the manager's way to success, while in reality he was stabbing him in the back with ill-chosen words, and doing more harm than had he

openly opposed the re-opening of the theatre. His editorial was calculated to create the impression that the respectable and intelligent part of the community did not attend theatres, and as all weak people in small places have a terrible fear of "Mrs. Grundy," and a strong desire to be thought intelligent and respectable, doubtless many of this class hesitated to lend their countenance to anything which the editor could only approve on the ground of expediency, they not understanding that the expediency was simply the desire to carry water on both shoulders. The editor was not slow in finding out which was the strong side, and his issue of May 13th contained the following:

"When theatres are conducted so as to 'shoot folly as it flies' if they are not always successful in their designs to 'raise the genius and to mend the heart,' they still perform a

valuable service in a very pleasant way, and people *will*, in spite of cynics and moralizers to the contrary, lend them the light of their countenance."

During the summer of 1839 Mr. Jefferson, who was an excellent painter as well as actor — and both gifts have descended to his son Joseph — returned to the city to prepare the theatre for the Company, and the "American" announced the opening for August 31st, with new scenery and decorations. The first performance was Coleman's musical comedy of "The Review, or the Wags of Windsor," and the "Illustrious Stranger, or Buried Alive." No cast was given in the advertisement, and no bill is in existence, but from notices in the "American" at different times we learn that Mr. A. Sullivan and C. L. Green had joined the Company, which remained about the same as the previous season. Mr. Jefferson had

succeeded Mr. Isherwood as Mr. McKinzie's partner in the management. The "American" of September 3d contained the following:

"The Chicago Theatre, under the polishing skill of Mr. Jefferson, appears in a new and beautiful dress, newly and neatly painted and provided with a complete change of fresh and tasteful scenery. The appropriate motto, 'for useful mirth and salutary woe,' which looks down over the drop curtain upon the auditorium, conveys an idea of the useful tendencies of the legitimate drama." In a later issue the editor read the ladies of the city a lecture for not attending the theatre, forgetful that the doubt he had thrown over its *respectability* had much to do with their remaining away. After assuring them that they were perfectly safe in attending, he said:

"If the ladies are waiting for fashionable precedents, we will inform them that at Spring-

field in this state the theatre was attended generally by the beauty and fashion of the fair sex and by the gentlemen of the place, of all official positions from Judge of the Supreme Court down. This has been the case, we believe, at St. Louis and in the East,"

September 14th, 1839, "Oliver Twist" was performed for the first time in Chicago, and Wm. Warren was the Bill Sykes. The "American" lauded his rendition of the character, and the editor's lecture to the ladies on theatre going was beginning to have effect, for on this occasion he writes: "The front seats and boxes were lighted up with the beauty and smiles of the fair sex."

"William Sykes" is not now a favorite with the ladies, yet if Mr. Warren would act the part in Boston, where his name will ever be a household word, there would be a lively time in securing seats, by both sexes.

On the 17th of September the "American" tells us that "Master Jefferson sang a comic song in which he won silver if not golden opinions." Joseph remembers this agreeable incident and alluded to it in his letter to me.

Frequent changes were necessary in those days, as the number of patrons was not large, and dramas, comedies, and tragedies of a standard character were given in rapid succession, the farce always winding up the performance, and Master Jefferson was a favorite with his comic songs between play and farce. Most of the plays of those days and the farces are now consigned to the shelves, like many other good things, because they are old. Driving the farce from the stage was a misfortune to the actor's art. They were the primaries in which the rudiments of the profession were impressed upon young artists, who now step into important work without proper tuition.

September 23d, 1839, is set down as the time of the first fairy spectacle in Chicago; most likely without the fairies, as they are always hard to find in small communities, and when found create a clatter among the village gossips. This first spectacle was "Cherry and Fairstar, or the Children of Cyprus." Considering the fact that the license was granted for the season on condition that no fireworks should be introduced, the management must have violated the conditions or curtailed one of the effects of this drama, a fiery dragon.

To digress, let me say "Cherry and Fairstar" was the attraction the first night I entered a theatre, and it was its fire effect which riveted it upon my memory, together with the circumstances under which I saw it at the Park Theatre, New York, I should think about 1833. I was started in life under Presbyterian auspices, drifting into Episcopalianism; my

mother sympathized with all the prejudices that existed at that time against theatres and actors, and was lavish in her advice that I should avoid them, which doubtless made me a little more anxious to find out how bad they really were. One evening, having saved my pennies for the occasion, I slipped out of the house, and joined a companion a few years older than myself, and we stole away to the Park Theatre. There were two plays that night, one a Roman tragedy, the name of which I never remembered, the other "Cherry and Fairstar." During the tragedy there were so many people killed that every word I had ever heard as to what terrible people actors were seemed to return to me and forced themselves into belief. To me, during that tragedy, they were indeed wicked. In "Cherry and Fairstar" I saw vice pursuing virtue; was in a fever of excitement, and only kept

quiet by my companion who was somewhat older, and was constantly telling me it was only a play. He had been there before. Of course there was much to please both eye and ear; my sympathies being with Cherry and Fairstar, I was ready to fight for them, but when the fiery dragon came on the stage and spurted fire from its mouth into the pit where I was sitting, I thought of my disobedience to my mother, and starting up ran out of the theatre thinking the devil was after me. The devil was more dreaded by boys in those days than now. I reached home, but could not enter the house without my mother's knowledge, and so was compelled to admit how bad I was, ask forgiveness, receive it, and join in her belief as to the wickedness of actors, of whom she knew nothing, and the sin of going to the theatre, where at that time she had never been. Fiery dragons and Ro-

man murderers were the companions of my slumbers that night, and I remained a good boy until I migrated west. But this is personal, and no way connected with the early stage of Chicago, and the production of the same play, in which the fiery dragon did not appear, and in fact he has never yet made his appearance in any after production of the play in this city.

This first spectacle evidently pleased, as it was repeated several times, an unusual occurrence in those days, and the "American" again called attention to the fact that ladies were going to the theatre, as the prejudice against their doing so was fast wearing away, not being supported by facts; those opposed to theatres being the only ones able to present indictments, with no evidence to sustain them.

During this season of 1839 Charles Kemble Mason, quite an able actor, appeared as a star,

aided by Mrs. McCluer, a fine actress. They presented a series of Shakespearean and other standard works. Mr. Mason was the Hamlet, Macbeth, Shylock and Romeo first known to Chicago.

The season terminated November 2d, and the company went east, and I find no record of their return as a company, and certainly this was the end of a management which had done some good work.

Chicago was fortunate falling into such hands as those who guided the early days of the drama. Both managers and artists created, with all not blinded by prejudice, an impression favorable to their profession, which has never been eradicated, and which had done much toward removing the scales from eyes which only gazed with the light of tradition, founded in darkness.

The seven years following the termination

of the season of 1839, the city was left without any dramatic company of repute at all in keeping with those under the control of Isherwood, McKinzie and Jefferson. The cause of this seven years' delay in that which had been so auspiciously begun can only be theorized upon. I would attribute it to the general state of the country at that time, brought about by the panic of 1837. My experience, and I have seen some panics, is, that while amusements do not feel any depressing effect at first, it comes by degrees, and is slow in leaving. It is a mistaken idea that people seek amusements when depressed, but it is a correct one that panics strike the first hard blow at a few interests, and in time the entire body politic is permeated with the disease. Hence amusements are the last to feel the blow, and the last to recover from it, receiving their full share of its weight. Trifling and

low amusements always thrive best in times of general depression, for the reason that they are patronized by the unthinking classes who never economize. And during panic times emotional religion also sees its best days.

During these seven years the itinerants which occasionally paid a visit were few and far between, and only of little moment when here. The quality is not to be wondered at when we consider the population of the city was less than 5,000. The great wonder is that so few people were able to support the talent which the early managers offered. But the salaries of actors in those days were not twenty per cent of those of the present time.

Circuses and shows occasionally made an appearance, but the first dramatic venture from 1839 to 1842 was made by Mrs. Mary C. Porter, who attempted to give performances without a license, which brought her in con-

flict with the authorities, and on April 4th she petitioned the Council to forgive her past sins and grant her a license for the future. Her prayer was doubtless granted, or quietly acquiesed in. No record of the fact exists, but on April 9th a benefit performance was announced, when "The Manager in Distress" was presented, from which it may be inferred that Mrs. Porter had enough of Chicago. She was followed by a Mr. H. B. Nelson, Yankee story teller and comedian, and company, who remained but a few days, and on August 4th, 1842, a license was granted to Messrs. Lynn and Powell for a season of one month at the "Rialto."

In their application they alluded to the hard times and lack of patronage, and prayed for a small amount to be named as a license, and the price was fixed at $15, and no record can be found of the number of passes the Council

received for this generosity, This company consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Powell, Mr. and Mrs. Hastings, Mrs. Ramsey, Mr. Lynn, Mrs. Graham, Mr. Sharpe and Mrs. Jackson, none of whom ever achieved a lasting fame in their profession.

August 30th, 1842, Dan. Marble appeared, accompanied by Mrs. Silsbee, and supported by the company just mentioned. "Black-eyed Susan" and the "Forest Rose," were the plays selected, and the "Democrat" stated that the patronage afforded Mr. Marble was discouragingly light, and added: "We are aware that a considerable portion of our community will not countenance a theatre, no matter how talented its members." The editor could see no cause for lack of patronage but the old one, dislike of the theatre; a string always ready to be harped upon.

Benjamin F. Taylor in recollection of those

days writes thus: "It was in that dirty old trap, the 'Rialto,' I think, that I saw Dan. Marble for the first time. The play was 'Black-eyed Susan,' and Marble's admirable William melted the house, as if it had been something in a crucible. It was, in its way, the perfection and simplicity of nature. The audience was a little mixed. There were the fellows that in New York would have 'Killed for Keiser,' the 'wake-me-up-when-Kirby-dies stripe.' There was a small handful of half breeds, a sprinkling of lieutenants from the army, one or two worn-out paymasters. The pit was full of sailors, with occasionally a wharf rat; but for fresh-water tars there was a wonderful effusion of salt water. Even the always conscious dress circle fluttered with any number of white cambric mops, and when the play took the right turn at last, the 'gods' applauded until the spiders hovering in their

webs, and the mice in the walls, were whist. Even the chaps that spent their time in the interludes in bawling 'boots' and 'supe' and eating peanuts, mopped out the corner of their eyes with their dirty knuckles, and had the theatrical management furnished soap as well as sorrow, some of them might have put a better face on the matter. I can see the central figures of that dress circle to-day. Hands that I think of have shriveled out of the white kids they wore that night. The blue dress coats and buff vests have been laid aside for other and stranger wear. Yonder, crowned with iron-gray Jacksonian hair, is the stately form of Col. Kercheval. The man near him, with large, luminous eyes, is Hon. Giles Spring, owner of one of the finest judicial minds that ever graced the state. Beyond him is Doctor Maxwell, with a step as light as that of a wisp of a girl, for all of his two hun-

dred and odd pounds of solid flesh. Close by are E. W. Tracy, Geo. W. Meeker and Doctor Stuart, and — but why keep on calling the dead men's roll? Some of the beauty as well as the manhood of the young city was there, and brightened up the dull old place like moonlight; but what matters it? The foot lights are out, the players departed, and the air is full of dust withal. Down with the curtain."

During the fall of 1842, a theatre, so called, was opened in what was known as the Chapman building, on the southeast corner of Wells (now Fifth Avenue) and Randolph streets, under the management of Mr. Hastings, a member of the previous company, which had doubtless succumbed to fate, and Mr. Hastings was not long in following, as no record of his continuance is made.

September 14, 1842, "Othello" was acted

in Chapman's building, for the benefit of Mrs. Powell, who appeared as "Desdemona," and the "Democrat" suggested that she introduce the song "Strike the Light Guitar," which she sang with great effect. "Othello" was acted on this occasion by a gentleman of the city, at the time a tailor, and afterward known as Mr. Geo. Ryer, a very excellent actor, and one of good repute, now dead.

During the same fall a Thespian company was formed and petitioned the Council to permit them to give occasional dramatic performances without paying a license therefor. John S. Potter, a man who is said to have started more theatres and failed oftener than any other man who lived in his day, asked for a license to open a theatre August 9th, 1843. Following him came the "Learned Pig" in 1844, and then an effort was made to establish a Museum, and a free license asked for

of course, or to quote from the petition, "one demanding no further compensation than the necessary perquisites to the proper officer granting the same." This request seems to have been granted November 21st, 1844, and the Museum became a fixed fact, having a legal existence. So numerous had the applications become from itinerants, for free or cheap licenses, that the Council, in self defense I presume, passed an ordinance in the fall of 1844, making $5 a performance a minimum and $50 a maximum amount to be charged, and empowered the Mayor to grant licenses at these figures, according to his discretion.

The Commercial building, 73 Lake street, became the home of the Museum in 1845. Its manager, Henry Fuller, boasted of an extensive variety of geology, mineralogy, conchology and ornithology, and promised that nothing should be introduced within its walls

not "in strict accordance with propriety, morality and religion." Admission 25 cents, children half price.

Manager Fuller on the 15th of November petitioned the Council to remove the license tax, urging that a Museum was strictly "a place of instruction." The Council was deaf to his prayer, and the Museum struggled on till February, 1846, when Mr. Fuller made another appeal, and after due deliberation the Council granted his request, conditioned that no transient entertainment or dramatic performance should be allowed. This did not meet the views of the manager, who replied he would be under the necessity of closing the Museum unless theatrical performances could be given free of license. Since the advent of Barnum, Museums have been looked upon by the dramatic profession as the means to an end, or a way "to beat the devil round the

stump," for the reason that certain good people would attend the performance given in the so-called lecture room of the Museum, who would not enter the doors of a theatre. For the same reason many theatres are called opera houses. This last petition of Fuller's was referred to a special committee of the Council, which reported: "We feel that the efforts of Messrs. Fuller and Seacomb to establish a Museum have not been properly appreciated by the citizens, and that they have not been afforded that encouragement and patronage which the merits of the Museum demand."

The committee recommended the following, which was adopted:

"*Resolved*, That in the opinion of the Common Council, the Museum of Messrs. Fuller and Seacomb is worthy of the support and patronage of the citizens of Chicago and the

country generally, and that all persons having natural or artificial curiosities be respectfully invited to make contributions of the same to the Museum."

This was a most liberal resolution, and doubtless the only one of its kind to be found in the records of the city. Mr. Fuller had evidently captured the city fathers, for in addition to this laudatory resolution an order was passed fixing the amount of license for six months at the nominal figure of $5, and the Museum, with dramatic attachments, was vouched for by the government of the city, and made an effort for a permanent existence, but failed to succeed.

This is the history of the amusements of the city from 1834 to 1846, briefly recorded. The "Rialto," which had become known as the "Theatre" building, was destroyed by fire in February, 1847. In the spring of that year

John B. Rice, who had been connected with managerial enterprises in the State of New York, between Albany and Buffalo, visited Chicago with a view of establishing himself in the new city of the lakes, and the hope of making it his home. Being favorably impressed with the outlook for the future of the place, which then contained a population of less than 17,000, Mr. Rice lost no time in selecting a site for a theatre, on the south side of Randolph street, near Dearborn, and proceeded to erect what became the first suitable building for the permanent home of the drama in Chicago. The opening night was the 28th of June, 1847. The entertainment presented was: First, an address written by G. W. Phillimore, a member of the company, and spoken by Mr. E. Harris, the leading man.

I quote a stanza, directed to the audience, evidencing the spirit in which Mr. Rice began

his career in Chicago, and in which he continued till the end:

"And now to you, to whom each rolling sun
Brings the results of enterprise begun;
Who see the fruits that bounteous Heaven decrees
Traverse the bosom of your inland seas;
View growing ports adorn the flashing strand
Where takes the tar the toil-brown farmer's hand;
Commerce and Agriculture side by side
United stand, our country's glorious pride.
Nature's true noblemen such union brings,
Their patent coming from the King of kings.
Appreciate these gifts dispensed to you,
And render thanks where all our praise is due."

The first play was the comedietta of the "Four Sisters," in which Mrs. Hunt (now Mrs. John Drew) appeared as the "Four Sisters," and Dan. Marble, engaged as a special star, appeared in the afterpiece. The company consisted of G. W. Phillimore, Geo. Mossop, Edwin Harris, Wm. Meeker, Jerry Merrifield,

Mr. Beckwith and Mr. Rice, Mrs. Hunt, Mrs. Merrifield, Miss Homer, a danseuse, and Mrs. Price.

The 28th of June, 1847, marked the dawn of a new era in the dramatic life of the young city, then struggling for position, and by many called at that time and for years after, a bubble. To follow the changes which took place from that day to the destruction of the heart of our city by fire in 1871, is a task to be performed by the book maker, and ere long the shelves of our society will contain a work giving a very accurate account of the city's progress, and of the amusements of all kinds which have called for the patronage of the citizens from the foundation of the city to the present day.

My task this evening is to deal with early Chicago, and the spirit which animated its citizens toward my profession in those days.

Time prevents my dealing with any but the early days; to do more would be verging into autobiography.

While Messrs. Isherwood, McKinzie and Jefferson may be considered the pioneers of the drama in Chicago, to John B. Rice must be awarded the honor of being the first to establish for it a worthy home, of giving it a position in social life which has increased in power and importance, and which, with fair-thinking people, must share the credit due for the building of a great and prosperous city.

Mr. Rice's early days in Chicago were not all those of sunshine, though by many thought to be so. He was one of those men who could struggle against adverse circumstances and encourage all connected with him to look for a bright day to-morrow. Chicago has been blessed with many such men, with whom failure meant try again. I became a member

of Mr. Rice's company in May, 1848, when he had been a resident manager but one year. I reached the city in a stage coach, in company with an old actor and friend, Mr. John Green, who being on his way to New York, advised me to seek my professional fortune nearer the rising sun. Mr. Green was an old friend of Mr. Rice, on whom we called to pay our respects, and were both persuaded to join his company and remain here. I have never had cause to regret the circumstances which prevented my march to the East, nor have I forgotten the cares and anxieties which beset the new manager. I can recall the dressing-room gossip; the wondering as to what would be the out-growth of the season, and the prophesies that Milwaukee in the winter must be looked to, to save Chicago in the summer.

Prejudices, brought from the mother country and planted in New England, had found their

way to the young city of the West, as the records thus far given show, and to a certain extent had taken root. The stigma that had been cast upon actors by an English parliament, three hundred years before, still lingered, and, in a small way, does so still, in minds guided by tradition. In my day in Chicago I have known a child refused admittance to a school, for the reason that the parents were connected with a theatre.

ROCK ISLAND Historical SOCIETY

In our first walk about Chicago Mr. Green and myself ran against what I call the comic side of these prejudices, for the reason that they amused me, while they enraged my friend, who was a warm-hearted Irishman, quick to anger. On our arrival we had put up at the Tremont House, but when engaged by Mr. Rice, the salary he could afford to pay reminded us that we must seek other quarters, and in our search for a boarding house we

were made to feel that a doubt existed as to whether the other boarders would leave if actors were taken in. Mr. Green was sensitive to indignities and ever ready to combat them. I was more conservative, and looked with pity rather than anger upon weak minds.

We had made terms with a boarding house, looked at the rooms and thought we were located, when the lady asked what our business might be.

Mr. Green replied proudly: "We are actors, members of Mr. Rice's company."

"Well," said the old lady, "You look like gentlemen, but I have never had an actor in my house, and — and — "

"Have no fear, madam," replied the old gentleman, with the polite bitterness of an outraged professional, "Have no fear, we will not contaminate ourselves by coming into it, until it is thoroughly purified."

We left our first boarding house, and proceeded in our search for another. Passing a neat building in the center of a large lot on Washington street, between State and Dearborn, we noticed the sign "For Rent," and concluded we might do well to commence housekeeping in a small way. The streets were in a terrible condition, and the approach to the house was by a narrow plankway. We knocked at the door and inquired the rental of the house, and were told that the owner had decided not to rent but sell the property, which consisted of about eighty front feet, and a very good frame house.

"And what do you expect to sell it for, may I ask?" said Green.

"$1,200, one quarter cash and the balance in one, two and three years," said the lady.

"And do you think a gentleman would live here three years if you should give him such a

mud hole?" said my friend, still combative toward the inhabitants of a city who looked with doubt upon members of his profession. He could have bought the place, which I presume is worth now about double per foot for what he was offered the eighty. He died poor. We succeeded in finding a boarding house, and I have never forgotten it. At every breakfast the landlord would first give thanks for what was before us, and then proceed to a side table, take up a large wooden bowl and spoon, and pass around the table crying out to each boarder "apple sass?" and before the boarder could say yes or no his plate was filled with stewed dried apples, which, if he made way with, would sustain him until dinner time. It was a boarding house where actors were not objected to, but where they remained but a short time. Returning to the Tremont to prepare to move, the

crowning indignity of the day was offered my old friend. The clerk handed us from the box containing the keys to our rooms, each a notice, which read something like this:

"You are hereby notified to appear on the 20th day of May, 1848, at seven o'clock in the morning, at the corner of Wells and South Water streets, with shovel and pickaxe, to work on the streets under the direction of," etc., etc.

For the moment, having no knowledge of the local laws, Mr. Green thought this outrage, as he termed it, was an intended insult to his profession, meaning that actors were only fit for street cleaners. I endeavored to appease the old gentleman, and did so by suggesting that we obey the summons and turn it into ridicule, by presenting ourselves at the time and place named, as the first and second grave diggers in Hamlet, with a "pickaxe and a

spade." The old man laughed, and before the time arrived we had forgotten the summons, and the officers of the law, as is frequently the case, being forgetful of their duties, the streets were in no better condition from our labors.

Mr. Rice's company was not large in numbers, but all were capable of playing many parts. Skillful doubling of characters was part of the art a young actor was proud of, and hence the length of cast was no bar to the production of a play, so all the standard works and new ones from eastern theatres were given in rapid succession; the work of an actor in those days being a mountain, compared to which the labor of the present-day actor is but a mole hill. During Mr. Rice's first season, T. D. Rice (Jim Crow Rice), J. E. Murdock, E. S. Conner and Julia Dean made their first appearance in Chicago as special or star attractions. They repeated

their visits in 1848, and their numbers were increased by the first appearance of Edwin Forrest, the elder Booth and Barney Williams. Charlotte Cushman and Eliza Logan, bright gems in the dramatic galaxy of American women, came later, and added to the number of noted artists who acted in Chicago by lamp and candle light, as did all who appeared at Mr. Rice's Randolph street theatre, as gas was not used in Chicago until September 4, 1850.

Monday, July 29, 1850, the first operatic performance was given in Rice's Theatre. Somnambula was the opera, with Miss Eliza Brienti as Amina, Mr. Manvers as Elvino, and Mr. Guibeti as Count Rodolpho. These operatic artists were assisted by the dramatic company, Miss Helen Mathers, a very good vocalist, filling the part of Liza, and myself, whose vocal abilities have never been rated

below their value, acting at the comic lover of Amina, and making all the noise I possibly could in the phantom chorus, thinking I was singing.

Somnambula was to be repeated Tuesday, July 30th, but the opera had not proceeded far when the alarm of fire was given, and in less than an hour the theatre was a heap of ruins. The fire did not occur in the theatre, but in a stable near by, and nearly the entire block, composed of frame buildings, was quickly destroyed. This fire put an end to opera and to our season, but not to Mr. Rice's energy. The company took to the road and appeared in St. Charles, Naperville, Aurora, and filled up their time as best they could, until Mr. Rice could commence his season in Milwaukee. He lost no time in erecting a new and better theatre by far than the one destroyed by fire, it being of brick. This time the loca-

tion was on Dearborn street, midway between Randolph and Washington. After the burning of Mr. Rice's Theatre, the large dancing hall in the Tremont House was temporarily fitted up for a theatre, and it was here that the Batemen Children first made their appearance in this city, and Patti gave her first concert April 21, 1852. Mr. Rice's second theatre was opened to the public February 3d, 1851. The performance commenced with the company singing "The Star Spangled Banner," then an address spoken by Mrs. Rice, and followed by "Love in Humble Life," "Captain of the Watch," and "The Dumb Belle," and shortly after the opening "Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper," was given for the first time in Chicago, and during this season Mr. Rice set a week aside for my appearance in a round of Yankee characters, which had formerly been acted by Dan. Marble, who died in

1849, and of whose widow I bought his plays, for the purpose of trying what I could do as a Yankee star. During the year 1850, the late Samuel Myers became a member of Mr. Rice's company, and for twenty-four years served an honorable professional career in his adopted city.

To mention the many notable incidents, productions of plays and appearances of actors who have passed away or become prominent during Mr. Rice's management, would occupy too much time. Mr. Rice must pass into history as the founder of the theatre in Chicago, and, speaking from a professional standpoint, it was fortunate for the young city, and for the profession, that he took the helm when he did, and guided the amusements of those days, for he gave dignity to every position he filled during life. The magnetism of his own honesty and sense of right made itself felt by all who

came in contact with him. Many who had joined in the prejudices against his calling became its friends on knowing him. Mr. Rice retired from theatrical life in 1856, and shortly after converted his theatre into business property, and remained a private citizen until April 18th, 1865, when he was elected mayor of the city, and reëlected to the same office in 1867, and his fellow citizens who placed him in that position never had cause to regret the act. He graced that office as he had his professional position, as he did the National Congress, to which he was elected in the fall of 1872, and of which he was a member when the call was made for him to assume the character of immortality, which call he heard on the 17th of December, 1874, he being in his sixty-fifth year.

As a tribute to his memory, which will be ever cherished by those who knew him, I ask

the Society to accept this portrait of him, and give it a fitting place upon its walls.* To have known Mr. Rice intimately, to have come in contact with him, was to have opportunities of receiving lessons in true manhood.

Like my old friend and manager,

"If more would act the play of life,
And never spoil it in rehearsal,
If prejudice would sheath its knife
And truth become more universal,
If custom, gray with ages grown
Had fewer blind men to adore it;
If right made might
In every fight,
The world would be the better for it."

The play and player have their mission. "Men are but children of a larger growth," and, like the infant in the cradle, the full-grown man must be amused or he will become restless and unruly.

*A portrait painted by Mr. John Phillips.

To study the wants, the necessities, the requirements of mankind should be the labor of those who claim they aim to elevate the race. Every phase of our social life is attended with evils which should be lopped off, and without doubt our amusements and our literature require and should receive a blow from the legal knife. Unfortunately, under our form of government (the weak points of which we are slow to strengthen), being early taught that "every man is a sovereign," and with the saying sounding in our ear "the King can do no wrong," together with state rights, county rights, city rights and town rights, it is plain to see what obstacles beset the rights of propriety. Our amusements should be worthy of thought, for they take part in the march from barbarism to civilization. Whatever pleasure carries with it a desire for an acknowledged vice should be marked from the list of

rational amusements, and those which lead to nothing worse than is contained within themselves should be the standard pleasures of mankind; and their proper guidance should occupy the thoughts of those we select to govern, as the thought of the parent watches and directs the pastime of the child. If an amusement creates a desire to gamble, the pleasure it gives is overbalanced by the sin it promotes. When the pleasure of those advanced in years is reached at the expense of bad example to the young, it should be our duty to discourage the pleasure, for the effect of good or bad example is stronger than that of good or bad advice. A short game of home gambling in a happy household may sow seed, yielding a harvest of sorrow. From that to the speed of the horse, with a view of improving the usefulness of the animal to man, our so-called "national game," and the sports of our col-

leges, called athletic, may not many exclaim "Good Lord deliver us," for by indulging in them desires are created which may mark the destiny even of the looker on. Let the good men, even the deacons, who rarely, if ever, go to a theatre, finding their amusement in the social game of poker,—which I hear is to be called "Commerce," as a refining title, suitable for the fashionable home,— reflect upon the example they are placing before those whose steps they guide.

That the drama can be, and to a large extent is, so shaped as to yield harmless pleasure cannot be disproved. It is man's natural amusement, and when joined with its adjunct, music, is capable of assuming so many forms as to be everlasting in the pleasure it provides. That it may be distorted and made foul, as it doubtless sometimes is, having no laws to check it, and no governments to enforce laws

if they existed, is no argument against the good that is in it, more than the misuse of the Christian religion (and it has had such use) should lead to a disbelief in a future life. The amusements of the people and their religion are of equal importance. Language is but the clothing of thought, and as a beautiful form may be wrapped in rags to its disparagement, so thought, worthy and noble, may be disfigured by the words with which it is conveyed. When we learn to look beyond the surface with eyes capable to discriminate, then will the beautiful form and noble thought be taken at their just value, regardless of the raiment which disfigures them. A heart prayer needs no words to bear it to the infinite.

Addison, the author of an essay on the evidence of Christianity, and also of the tragedy of "Cato," in speaking of Betterton, the actor, said he had received from his performances,

"more strong impressions of what is great and noble in human nature than from the arguments of the most solid philosophers, or the descriptions of the most charming poets he had ever read."

Jeremy Collier, who lived and preached in the seventeenth century, and whom later ministers imitate in wholesale denunciation and suggested suppression of the theatre, admitted it to be "the purpose of the play to recommend virtue and the discontinuance of vice, to show the uncertainty of human greatness, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice; to expose the singularities of pride; to repress affectation; to make falsehood contemptible, and in short, to bring infamy and neglect upon every bad thing that deserves their visitation."

That is not a bad purpose admitted by an ancient enemy of the theatre; an enemy for the reason that he looked only on the surface.

One phase of the history of the theatre in Chicago debars the institution of the respect of many good people, who, while thinking they see plainly, only do so in the strong light of prejudice; hence to them faults seem glaring, which to others, equally pure as themselves, appear dim and trifling. It needs no ghost to come from the grave to tell us our habits are fast changing from those which prevailed a hundred years ago, or even fifty, in puritan New England. And, as in the days when the Reformation began, many pure people saw the destruction, by it, of all good, so with our changing habits many see nothing but evil, while the world is growing better every day, and man advancing in his mission. In most of our American cities Sunday theatricals are unknown, and were so here until within the now ending decade. That they have so strong a hold here is by a certain

portion of worthy citizens attributed to the degeneracy of the theatre, and to this class of good people, who should be ever ready to correct an error of judgment, I direct my attention, believing they are to be found among the members of this society, and therefore regarded as having a pride in all that pertains to the city, and its progress in all matters tending to make it the metropolis of their dreams in youth, reaching reality as they approach the allotted time of man.

It is not my desire to shield the theatre from one iota of its sins; but rather expose them with the hope of bettering; but in preparing history let us look facts squarely in the face, and adduce from them truth which will stand without support. As citizens of a cosmopolitan city we cannot escape a certain responsibility for the social errors of the same. As we become neglectful of our citizenship,

errors take root, and to the extent that we love political party more than city, the evil grows. Had the Chinese first attempted Sunday theatricals in Chicago one Sabbath would have ended them, for Chinese are not voters! But says my worthy citizen, the Chinese do give them in San Francisco. True, but San Francisco imbibes its customs and ideas of the proprieties of social life, not from New England, as much as from Mexico and Spain, where Sunday ends when mass is over, and vespers is the connecting link of saint and man. Had the evil, so called, been inaugurated by Americans, its life would have been equally brief, for while Americans vote, they are seldom, if ever, looked upon by political parties as a balance of power, and hence their wishes are seldom considered by wire pullers. The Sunday theatre was first started here in a foreign language, whether Dutch, Swedish,

German or Scandinavian, I am not prepared to say, nor does it matter which, as we are in the habit of classing all these from a political standpoint, as Germans, and while we have no better citizens, their ideas as to the Sabbath do not conform with the New England idea, and as the German is more liberal his views are gaining strength throughout this country. In New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, Sunday-night concerts are given, and theatrical performances will follow. I hear in Old England, always slow, they have got as far as Sunday rehearsals. In my day Boston did not permit Saturday-night theatricals, considering them too near Sunday, but as the world advances the old-fashioned Sunday of our boyhood would seem to have dropped behind, and it is for the thinkers to say what they intend to do about it. Opposition to Sunday amusements has more sentiment in it than phil-

osophy. To the average American the day appeals to the religious element of his nature, which from infancy has taught him to reverence the day and keep it holy, or at least to hide his sins on that day from his fellow men. Now the same religious element is inherited by our foreign-born citizens, but his early education has taught him to apply it in a different way. Both Americans and Germans are selfish, and both view the subject with all the force which selfishness begets, and herein lies the stumbling block of the human race. Selfishness is a birthright implanted in our nature to insure the progress of our race, which, when perfection is reached, will cast it off, and Earth will become Heaven. It is the abuse of this inheritance which all good citizens should combat with thought, discretion and discrimination. It guides those who seek and those who oppose Sunday

amusement. I am opposed to them, not from the harm they do to those who seek to be amused, for my experience tells me to that class they are harmless, and give pleasure. But my opposition springs from the fact that labor and anxiety are added to those who furnish the amusement, and who require and deserve an equal amount of rest with their fellow man. Every merchant will admit that evils exist in his business which he is powerless to remedy, and so he drifts along with the tide of his trade. If we view the subject with judgment we must arrive at the conclusion that the public amusement unfit for Sunday should not be tolerated any day. If one day is better than another, let us aim to elevate man up to that day and have the others follow. If we arrive at the conclusion that in large cities like ours, the masses must be provided with amusement, even on Sunday, let

us bend our energies to have such as are least harmful, while they satisfy the demand. The drama and music have no sin as a companion; their teachings lead to purity, morality and the religion of nature. The many forms they assume are like the church creeds, serving to please "many men of many minds," and can be so shaped as to be everlasting in their usefulness. No sin, vice, wickedness of any nature traced to their door but can be found lurking throughout our social system, springing from frailty, born with humanity.

"Little or much of what we see, we do;
We are all both actors and spectators too."

Let us recognize that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Let us seek to understand that the life of these players is eternal; having its entrances and its exits; is restless; disappears in darkness; cannot be seen — but it is

still life! Could we so regulate this world as to suit all classes, with their many whims and caprices, there would be no need of Heaven, for Earth would be perfect, and the end of life's prologue called "death," would not be necessary to lead us to a home where selfishness is unknown.

Man's chief labor should be to work for man! To work for him in a worldly and practical way. To please and satisfy the Father, aid his children. Our churches and all living in large cities blessed with more than an average share of this world's good, should unite in a work that for the masses would furnish free amusement at least once a week, and for this no better day than Sunday. This would be a missionary work worthy the worker, producing good results in our very midst. Many reasons can be urged for this work, for, glancing at the history of the world,

since the dawn of the Christian era, with a mind free from prejudice, have we not cause to hope, as we view the advance of man, that before that era has doubled its age the spiritual body will have gained such power over the natural body, that man in his purified state will stand erect, beneath a halo of truth, and with the honest pride of one who has fought the earth battle, and subdued selfishness, exclaim: "Thy will *is* done on Earth, as it is in Heaven!"

CHICAGO, February, 1884.